Sankashti Vrat Katha (Chaitra)

The story of Vikata Ganapati

It is Satyuga. Peace and prosperity prevail in and around Makaradwaja's kingdom. Yet Makaradwaja is sad. He is childless. With the blessings of rishi Yagnavalkya, he is blessed with a boy after a couple of years.

Makardwaja is overwhelmed with joy. He dotes on his son and hands over his kingdom to his trusted minister, Dharmapal. Dharmapal has access to the king’s treasury. But he never misuses the money. Makaradwaja rewards him with a handsome salary for taking such good care of his kingdom. Dharmapal has five sons of his own. They all are scholars. In due course of time, he gets all his sons married.

Dharmapal’s youngest daughter-in-law is a devout bhakta of Lord Ganesha. She has been fasting on all Sankashtis ever since she was a child. So one day she discusses this with her in-laws and says, “I would like to continue fasting on all Sankashtis here too.”

Dharmapal’s wife looks at her son and says, “I think your wife invokes deities using tantra and mantra to control you. I have never heard of a fast called Sankashti or a God called Vikata Ganapati either. We are Kshatriyas. Why do we need to believe in God? And what is she praying for? We have an abundance of everything in our house. Yet your wife says she will fast all through the day and eat a frugal meal only after she sees the

moon in the night. Why don’t you thrash her and bring her to her senses?”

So Dharmapal’s youngest son forbids his wife from fasting on any day. The young daughter in law cries herself to sleep at nights on Sankashtis. She prays to lord Vikata Ganapati and says, “Dear Lord, please forgive me for breaking all my Sankashti fasts. My husband and in-laws think they can surmount their challenges because they have the king’s wealth at their disposal. But money cannot buy us bliss, can it? They will realize your greatness only when they face some kind of a calamity. Until then Maya will continue to delude them…”Lord Vikata Ganapati feels the pain of his devotee. He decides to pave the path for her.

The very next day, lord Vikata Ganapati appears in the king’s palace assuming the form of Dharmapal. No one suspects him. He looks at the prince and says, “Our spies say that your life is in danger. We need to catch the thief red-handed. So please accompany me to my mansion and live with us till we nab the thief. Complete secrecy is a must else the thief will get away.”

The young prince assumes Dharmapal is talking to him. So he follows the instructions of lord Vikata Ganapati. He goes to Dharmapal’s mansion through the back door. Lord Vikata Ganapati ensures that he is comfortably settled in one of the many unoccupied rooms in Dharmapal’s mansion, locks the door from outside and disappears from there.

Meanwhile, Makaradwaja realizes his son is missing. He summons Dharmapal and asks him to search for his missing

son. Dharmapal’s spies search for the missing prince all over the kingdom but are unable to find him. Makaradwaja's spies leave nothing to chance. They search Dharmapal’s mansion too. Everyone is stunned when the find the missing prince sleeping peacefully in Dharmapal’s mansion.

When Makaradwaja questions the prince he looks at him innocently and says, “Dharmapal said my life was in danger and he wanted to protect me! Is something wrong? Has the thief been nabbed?” Makaradwaja is furious with Dharmapal and says, “You traitor, you wanted to murder my son and then usurp my throne, didn’t you? You have betrayed my trust. You shall be hanged to death tomorrow for doing this.” Makaradwaja walks out of Dharmapal’s mansion angrily.

Dharmapal is stunned. He wonders how the prince entered his mansion. He knew that the palace, especially the prince's quarters, and his mansion too were heavily guarded. Things just do not make any sense to him.

Dharmapal’s daughter in law watches the dramatic turn of events quietly. No one had eaten anything on that day. She alone knows it was the auspicious day of Sankashti. She starts praying to lord Vikata Ganapati. She begs her husband and in-laws too to do the same. She says, “This crisis has shattered the peace of our home. Please, let’s pray to lord Vikata Ganapati. Today is Sankashti. We just need to meditate upon lord Vikata Ganapati. He will remove our obstacles. Since it is the month of Chaitra, we should seat him on a Vinayaka

Peetam and offer him besan laddoos. This will please him the most.”

Dharmapal’s wife says, “I realize my mistake now bahu. We might have an abundance of money but all crises cannot be solved with money alone. Let’s pray to lord Vikata Ganapati and have our meal after catching a glimpse of the moon today. ” Dharmapal, his wife, all his sons and other daughters in law offer their prayers to lord Vikata Ganapati who is placated by their sincere prayers.

He knows the prince is sleeping in Makaradwaja's quarters because Makaradwaja did not want to risk losing him again. So lord Vikata Ganapati uses his divine powers and wreaks havoc in the prince’s quarters. The plan works. It is lord Vikata Ganapati’s plan after all. The next day, all hell breaks loose in the palace when the king comes to know that someone had attempted to murder the prince during the night.

Makaradwaja is shocked. He cannot understand how the murderer managed to enter the prince’s quarters - despite it being so heavily guarded. He assumes Dharmapal had come to know about this murder plan beforehand through his network of trustworthy spies. The murderer had probably delayed his plan by a day because of the commotion caused in the kingdom the previous day. Dharmapal had done the right thing by taking the prince away to his mansion without his knowledge for his safety was more important than anything else.

Dharmapal’s family had spent the entire night praying to Lord Ganesha and listening to his Vrat Katha. They see the king

approaching their mansion early the next morning and wait with bated breath…they assume they will never see Dharmapal again.

But Makaradwaja hugs Dharmapal tightly and says, “Dear friend Dharmapal, you are my most loyal and trusted minister. Yet I doubted you. Had it not been for your alacrity, I would have lost my son forever.” Makaradwaja explains all that had happened in the palace that night to Dharmapal.

Dharmapal looks at his youngest daughter in law speechlessly. A calamity had struck them the previous day. His life was at stake then. But today all the obstacles in his life had been miraculously removed. Dharmapal accepts the wisdom of his daughter in law’s faith in lord Vikata Ganapati and vows to fast on all Sankashtis from then onwards.

Faith forces us to look beyond our possessions, position and identity. Rituals, fasts and vrat kathas infuse humility within us, temper our ego and help us understand and remember….that nothing can or will lie in our hands……..at any time in our lives.